The VALIANTS of VIRGINIA

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ILLUSTRATIONS by LAUREN STOUT

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SYNOPSIS.

John Valiant, a rich society favorite, suddenly discovers that the Valiant corporation, which his father founded and which was the principal source of his wealth, has failed. He voluntarily turns over his private fortune to the receiver for the corporation. His entire remaining possessions consist of an old motor car, a white bull dog and Damory court, a neglected estate in Virginia. On the way to Damory court he meets Shirley Dandridge, an auburn-haired beauty, and decides that he is going to like Virginia immensely. Shirley's mother, Mrs. Dandridge, and Major Bristow exchange reminiscences during which it is revealed that the major, Valiant's father, and a man named Sasson were rivals for the hand of Mrs. Dandridge in her youth. Sasson and Valiant fought a duel on her account in which the former was killed. Valiant finds Damory court overgrown with weeds and creepers and the buildings in a very much neglected condition. He decides to rehabilitate the place and make the land produce a living for him. Valiant saves Shirley from the bite of a snake, which bites him. Knowing the deadliness of the bite, Shirley sucks the poison from the wound and saves his life. Shirley tells her mother of the incident and the latter is strangely moved at hearing that a Valiant is again living at Damory court.

CHAPTER XVI—Continued.

The major nodded. "Ah, yes," he said. "The Continental prison-camp."

"And just over this rise there I can see an old court-house, and the Virginia Assembly boiling under the golden tongue-lashing of lean raw-boned Patrick Henry. I see a messenger gallop up and see the members scramble to their saddles—and then, Tarleton and his red-coats streaming up, too late."

"Well," commented the doctor deliberately, "all I have to say is, don't materialize too much to Mrs. Poly Gifford when you meet her. She'll have you lecturing to the Ladies' Church Guild before you know it."

"I hope you ride, Mr. Valiant?" the latter asked genially.

"I'm fond of it," said Valiant, "but I have no horse as yet."

"I was thinking," pursued the major, "of the coming tournament."

"Tournament?"

The doctor cut in. "A ridiculous cock-a-doodle-do which gives the young bucks a chance to rig out in silly toggery and prance their colts before a lot of petticoats!"

"It's an annual affair," explained the major; "a kind of spectacle. For many years, by the way, it has been held on a part of this estate—perhaps you will have no objection to its use this season?—and at night there is a dance at the Country Club. By the way, you must let me introduce you there—tomorrow. I've taken the liberty already of putting your name up."

"Good lord!" growled the doctor, aside. "He counts himself young! If I'd reached your age, Bristow—"

"You have," said the major, nettled. "Four years ago!—As I was saying, Mr. Valiant, they ride for a prize. It's a very ancient thing—I've seen references to it in a colonial manuscript in the Byrd Library at Westover. No doubt it's come down directly from the old jousts."

"You don't mean to say," cried his hearer in genuine astonishment, "that Virginia has a lineal descendant of the tourney?"

The major nodded. "Yes. Certain sections of Kentucky used to have it, too, but it has died out there. It exists now only in this state. It's a curious thing that the old knightly meetings of the middle ages should survive today only on American soil and in a corner of Virginia."

Doctor Southall, meanwhile, had set his gaze on the litter of pamphlets. He turned with an appreciative eye. "You're beginning in earnest. The

The Other Got Up and Stood Before the Mantel-Piece in a Napoleonic Attitude.

Agricultural Department. And the Congressional frank."

"I'm afraid I'm a sad sketch as a scientist," laughed Valiant. "My point of view has to be a somewhat practical one. I must be self-supporting. Damory Court is a big estate. It has grain lands and forest as well. If my ancestors lived from it, I can. It's not only that," he went on more slowly, "I want to make the most of the place for its own sake, too. Not only of its possibilities for earning, but of its natural beauties. I lack the resources I once had, but I can give it thought and work, and if they can bring Damory Court back to anything even remotely resembling what it once was, I'll not spare either."

The major smote his knee and even the doctor's face showed a grim, if transient approval. "I believe you'll do it!" exclaimed the former. "And let me say, sah, that the neighborhood is not unaware of the splendid generosity which is responsible for the present lack of which you speak."

Valiant put out his hand with a little gesture of deprecation, but the other disregarded it. "Confound it, sah, it was to be expected of a Valiant. Your ancestors wrote their names in capital letters over this country. They were an up and down lot, but good or bad (and, as Southall says, I reckon"—he nodded toward the great portrait above the couch—"they weren't all little woolly lambs) they did big things in a big way."

Valiant leaned forward eagerly, a question on his lips. But at the moment a diversion occurred in the shape of Uncle Jefferson, who re-entered, bearing a tray on which set sundry jugs and clinking glasses, glowing with white and green and gold.

"You old humbug," said the doctor, "don't you know the major's that poisoned with mint-juleps already that he can't get up before eight in the morning?"

"Well, suh," tittered Uncle Jefferson, "Ah done foun' er mint-baid down below de kitchens dis mawnin'. Yo'-all gemmun' 'bout de bigges' expuhts in dis yeah county, en Ah reck'n Mars' Valiant sho' 'sist on yo' samplin' et."

"Sah," said the major feelingly, turning to his host, "I'm proud to drink your health in the typical beverage of Virginia!" He touched glasses with Valiant and glared at the doctor, who was sipping his own thoughtfully. "Poems have been written on the julep, sah."

"They make good epitaphs, too," observed the doctor.

"I noticed your glass isn't going begging," the major retorted. "Unc' Jefferson, that's as good mint as grew in the gyarden of Eden. See that those lazy niggers of yours don't grub the patch out by mistake."

"Yas, sah," said Uncle Jefferson, as he retired with the tray. "Ah gwineter put er fence eroun' dat ar baid 'fo' sundown."

The question that had sprung to Valiant's lips now found utterance. "I saw you look at the portrait there," he said to the major. "Which of my ancestors is it?"

The other got up and stood before the mantel-piece in a Napoleonic attitude. "That," he said, fixing his eye-glasses, "is your great-grandfather, Devil-John Valiant."

"Devil-John!" echoed his host. "Yes, I've heard the name."

The doctor guffawed. "He earned it, I reckon. I never realized what a sinister expression that missing optic gives the old ruffian. There was a skirmish during the war on the hill-side yonder and a bullet cut it out. When we were boys we used to call him 'Old One-Eye.'"

"It interests me enormously," John Valiant spoke explosively.

"The stories of Devil-John would fill a mighty big book," said the major. "By all accounts he ought to have lived in the middle ages." Crossing the library, he looked into the dining-room. "I thought I remembered. The portrait over the console there is his wife, your great-grandmother. They say he bet that when he brought his bride home, she should walk into Damory Court between rows of candle-sticks worth twenty-thousand dollars. He made the wager good, too, for when she came up those steps out there, there was a row of ten candles burning on either side of the doorway, each held by a young slave worth a thousand dollars in the market.

"Some say he grew jealous of his wife's beauty. There were any number of stories told of his cruelties to her that aren't worth repeating. She died early — poor lady — and your grandfather was the only issue. Devil-John himself lived to be past seventy, and at that age, when most men were stacking their sins and groaning with the gout, he was dicing and fox-hunting with the youngest of them. He always swore he would die with his boots on, and they say when the doctor told him he had only a few hours leeway, he made his slaves dress him completely and prop him on his horse. They galloped out so, a negro on either side of him. It was a stormy night, black as the Earl of Hell's riding-boots, with wind and lightning, and he rode cursing at both. There's an old black-gum tree a mile from here that they still call Devil-John's tree. They were just passing under it when the lightning struck it. Lightning has no effect on the black-gum, you know. The bolt glanced from the tree and struck him between the two slaves without harming either of them. It killed his horse, too. That's the story. To be sure at this date nobody can separate fact from fiction. Possibly he wasn't so much worse than the rest o' his neighbors—not excepting the parsons. 'Other times, other manners.'"

"They weren't any worse than the present generation," said the doctor malevolently. "Your four bottle men then knew only claret: now they punish whiskey-straight."

The major buried his nose in his julep for a long moment before he looked at the doctor blandly. "I agree with you, Bristow," he said: "but it's the first time I ever heard you admit that much good of your ancestors."

"Good!" said the doctor belligerently. "Me? I don't! I said people now were no better. As for the men of that time, they were a cheap swaggering lot of bullies and swash-bucklers. When I read history I'm ashamed to be descended from them."

"I desire to inform you, sah," said the major, stung, "that I too am a descendant of those bullies and swash-bucklers, as you call them. And I wish from my heart I thought we, nowadays, could hold a tallow-dip to them."

"You refer, no doubt," said the doctor with sarcasm, "to our friend Devil-John and his ideal treatment of his wife!"

"No, sah," replied the major warmly. "I'm not referring to Devil-John. There were exceptions, no doubt, but for the most part they treated their women folk as I believe their Maker made them to be treated! The man

What He Had Drawn From the Shelf Was the Morocco Case That Held the Rusted Dueling-Pistol!

who failed in his courtesy there, sah, was called to account for it. He was mighty apt to find himself standing in the cool dawn at the butt-end of a—"

He broke off and coughed. There was an awkward pause in which he set down his glass noisily and rose and stood before the open bookcase. "I envy you this, sah," he said with somewhat of haste. "A fine old collection. Bless my soul, what a curious volume!"

As he spoke, his hand jerked out a heavy-looking leather-back. Valiant, who had risen and stood beside him, saw instantly that what he had drawn from the shelf was the morocco case that held the rusted dueling-pistol! In the major's hands the broken box opened. A sudden startled look darted across his leonine face. With smothered exclamation he thrust it back between the books and closed the glass door.

Valiant had paled. His previous finding of the weapon had escaped his mind. Now he read, as clearly as if it had been printed in black-letter across the sunny wall, the significance of the major's confusion. That weapon had been in his father's hand when he faced his opponent in that fatal duel! It flashed across his mind as the doctor lunged for his hat and stick and got to his feet.

"Come, Bristow," said the latter irritably. "Your feet will grow fast to the floor presently. We mustn't talk a new neighbor to death. I've got to see a patient at six."

CHAPTER XVII.

John Valiant Asks a Question.

Valiant went with them to the outer door. A painful thought was flooding his mind. It hampered his speech and it was only by a violent effort that he found voice:

"One moment! There is a question I would like to ask."

Both gentlemen had turned upon the steps and as they faced him he thought a swift glance passed between them. They waited courteously, the doctor with his habitual frown, the major's hand fumbling for the black ribbon on his waistcoat.

"Since I came here, I have heard"—his tone was uneven—"of a duel in which my father was a principal. There was such a meeting?"

"There was," said the doctor after the slightest pause of surprise. "Had you known nothing of it?"

"Absolutely nothing."

The major cleared his throat. "It was something he might naturally not have made a record of," he said. "The two had been friends, and it—it was a fatal encounter for the other. The doctor and I were your father's seconds."

There was a moment's silence before Valiant spoke again. When he did his voice was steady, though drops had sprung to his forehead. "Was there any circumstance in that meeting that might be construed as reflecting on his—honor?"

"Good God, no!" said the major explosively.

"On his bearing as a gentleman?"

There was a hiatus this time in which he could hear his heart beat. In that single exclamation the major seemed to have exhausted his vocabulary. He was looking at the ground. It was the doctor who spoke at last, in a silence that to the man in the doorway weighed like a hundred atmospheres.

"No!" he said bluntly. "Certainly not. What put that into your head?"

When he was alone in the library Valiant opened the glass door and took from the shelf the morocco case. The old shiver of repugnance ran over him at the very touch of the leather. In the farthest corner was a low commode. He set the case on this and moved the big tapestry screen across the angle, hiding it from view.

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In the great hall at Damory Court the candles in their brass wall-sconces blinked back from the polished parquetry and the shining fire-dogs, filling the rather solemn gloom with an air of warmth and creature-comfort. Leaning against the newel-post, Valiant gazed about him. How different it all looked from the night of his coming!

He began to walk up and down the floor, teasing pricks of restlessness urging him. He opened the door and passed into the unlighted dining-room. On the sideboard set a silver loving-cup that had arrived the day before in a huge box with his books and knick-knacks. He had won it at polo. He lifted it, fingering its carved handles. He remembered that when that particular score had been made, Katharine Fargo had sat in one of the drags at the side-line.

But the memory evoked no thrill. Instead, the thought of her palely-cold, passionless beauty called up another mobile thoroughbred face instinct with quick flashings of mirth and hauteur. Again he felt the fierce clutch of small fingers, as they fought with his in that struggle for his life. Each line of that face stood before him—the arching brows, the cameo-delicacy of profile, the magnolia skin and hair like a brown-gold cloud across the sun.

He stepped down to the graveled drive and followed it to the gate, then, bareheaded, took the Red Road. Along this highway he had rattled in Uncle Jefferson's crazy hack—with her red rose in his hand. The musky scent of the pressed leaves in the book in his pocket seemed to be all about him.

The odor of living roses, in fact, was in the air. It came on the scarce-felt breeze, a heavy calling perfume. He walked on, keeping the road by the misty infiltrating shimmer of the stars, with a sensation rather of gilding than of walking. It occurred to him that if, as scientists say, colors emit sound-tones, scents also should possess a music of their own: the honeysuckle fragrance, maybe—soft mellow fluting as of diminutive wind-instruments; the far-faint sickly odor of lilies—the upper register of faery violins; this spicy breath of roses—blending, throbbing chords like elfin echoes of an Italian harp. The fancy pleased him; he could imagine the perfume no in the air carried with it an under-music, like a ghostly harping.

It came to him at the same instant that this was no mere fancy. Somewhere in the languorous night a harp was being played. He paused and listened intently, then went on toward the sound. The rose scent had grown stronger; it was almost in that heavy air, as if he were breasting an etherial sea of attar. He felt as if he were treading on a path of rose-leaves, down which the increasing melody flowed crimsonly to him, calling, calling.

He stopped stock-still. He had been skirting a close-cropped hedge of box. This had ended abruptly and he was looking straight up a bar of green-yellow radiance from a double doorway. The latter opened on a porch and the light, flung across this, drenched an arbor of climbing roses, making it stand out a mass of woven rubies set in emerald.

He drew a long sigh of more than delight, for framed in the doorway he saw a figure in misty white, leaning to the gilded upright of a harp. He knew at once that it was Shirley. Holding his breath, he came closer, his feet muffled in the thick grass. He stood in the dense obscurity, one hand gripping the gnarled limb of a catalpa, his eyes following the shapely arms from wrist to shoulder, the fingers straying across the strings, the bending cheek caressing the carved wood. She was playing the melody of Shelley's "Indian Serenade"—touching the chords softly and tenderly—and his lips moved, molding themselves soundlessly to the words.

The serenade died in a single long note. As if in answer to it there rose a flood of bird-music from beyond the arbor—jets of song that swelled and rippled to a soaring melody. She heard it, too, for the gracile fingers fell from the strings. She listened a moment, with head held to one side, then sprang up and came through the door and down the steps.

He hesitated a moment, then a single stride took him from the shadow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Beyond the Box-Hedge.

As he greeted her, his gaze plunged deep into hers. She had recoiled a step, startled, to recognize him almost instantly. He noted the shrinking and thought it due to a stabbing memory of that forest-horror. His first words were prosaic enough:

"I'm an unconscionable trespasser," he said. "It must seem awfully prowly, but I didn't realize I was on private property till I passed the hedge there."

As her hand lay in his, a strange fancy stirred in him: in that wood-meeting she had seemed something witch-like, the wilful spirit of the passionate spring herself, mixed of her aerial essences and jungle wildernesses; in this scented dim-lit close she was grave-eyed, subdued, a paler pensive woman of under half-guessed sadnesses and haunting moods. With her answer, however, this gravity seemed to slip from her like a garment. She laughed lightly.

"I love to prowl myself. I think sometimes I like the night better than the day. I believe in one of my incarnations I must have been a panther."

They both laughed. "I'm growing superstitious about flowers," he said. "You know a rose figured in our first meeting. And in our last—"

She shrank momentarily. "The cape jessamines! I shall always think of that when I see them!"

"Ah, forgive me!" he begged. "But when I remember what you did—for me! Oh, I know! But for you, I must have died."

"But for me you wouldn't have been bitten. But don't let's talk of it." She shivered suddenly.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

DROVE THE CAT TO SUICIDE

Representative Probably Did a Little Thinking After He Had Heard Policeman's Story.

"Alfalfa Bill" Murray, representative from Oklahoma, made a tour of Washington a short time ago with a party of friends. In due time they reached the Washington monument, and the Oklahoma statesman told at length of the beauties of the shaft.

At the close of his peroration, Alfalfa Bill mopped his brow and turned genially to a minion of the law nearby.

"How about it," asked he; "isn't that some little talk on this ancient pile of masonry?"

"You forgot about the cat," replied that official, imperturbably.

"What cat?"

"The brindled cat of 1896."

"Well, what about him?" queried Representative Murray.

"Oh, nothing," replied the guard, evasively.

"See here," said Mr. Murray, sternly, "I demand to know about this cat."

"It ain't much of a story," replied the guard. "Your talking there reminded me of it. Y'see this here cat lived in the monument. Well, sir, me and another chap that used to be here noticed that cat acting queerly every time a party came along and was told about the beauties of 'this vast pile of masonry,' as you was saying.

"Then one day along came a gent with some friends and talked for three-quarters of an hour along this line, when blamed if that there cat didn't run all the way up 500 odd feet of steps and commit suicide by jumping off the top of the monument."—Washington Post.

Some Mushroom.

Epicures in the United States, who love mushrooms will long for a time in the Austrian Tyrol, where real mushrooms grow. A traveler writing of the region says: Bordering the road that led up the mountain were Italian chestnut trees, so large that it took from three to five of us to span the trunks of most of them. Under one of these one evening I saw crouching what I took to be a small, dark gray kitten. Stooping, I found that it was not a kitten, but a mushroom. Our good peasant neighbor, hurrying toward me, begged that I would not disturb it, saying that she depended on this every year. After a few days of rain, what had seemed a kitten now looked a stately cat, and when it reached the weight of six pounds it was gathered and eaten.

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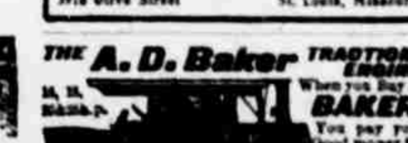

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